

BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Matthew Fike, PhD

Aardema, Frederick. *Explorations in Consciousness: A New Approach to Out- of-Body Experiences*. Mount Royal, Quebec: Mount Royal Publishing, 2012. ISBN 978-0-9879119-0-2. xvii + 320 pages. \$24.95.

Frederick Aardema is a research assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Montreal who has been going out of body for over twenty years. In *Explorations in Consciousness: A New Approach to Out-of-Body Experiences*, he sets out “to bridge the gap between prescientific and scientific approaches to the OBE” (xv). In that spirit, he synthesizes a broad knowledge of the out-of-body literature with field theory from quantum physics, using his own OBEs as illustrations. Aardema’s carefully measured claims about the objective reality of the second body and the afterlife, the nonseparation of the second body, and the highly subjective relationship between imagination and perception will not elicit universal agreement. Yet his conclusions, many of which resonate with cutting-edge science, deserve careful attention, especially because they provide a basis for two very helpful chapters that suggest methods for inducing the out-of-body state and for traveling nonphysically.

The book’s most fundamental assumption is that because “consciousness precedes matter” it “is wherever it constructs itself to be” (253, 153). Consciousness is anywhere and everywhere. The book’s most important—and controversial—conclusion is that the “second body,” “phantom body,” or “dream body” is a mental construct that does not actually go anywhere. Of greatest importance in that model of the OBE is not the mechanics of multiple detachable energy bodies, as in the theosophical tradition, but the perspective that consciousness takes. In Aardema’s words, “all that is required to establish the out-of-body state is to get up out of bed once the process of sensory retraction has been completed. You can try to leave what appears to be your physical body, but you would be trying to leave a body image that is already free of physical limitations” (63). The transition just described is parasomatic (with continuity of body awareness and a sense of separation), but transition may just as easily be asomatic (with neither body awareness nor a sense of separation).

The mind’s construction of reality even when we are wide awake suggests a “mediational model of reality” (237), a blending of subjective/inner and objective/outer. Ultimate reality, if there even is such a thing, is elusive at best because of the mediation by consciousness. In such a model, “experience is in fact the only true vehicle of understanding” (254), though Aardema regularly underscores the difference between experience and fact. Whereas, in daily life, we experience the things that are most possible, OBE increases the possibilities that consciousness may encounter. That is why the author devotes the middle portion of his book

to a discussion of three main fields, all of which are subjective to some degree: the physical, the personal, and the collective.

In keeping with the mediational model, Aardema finds perception in the physical world to be mostly arbitrary. “Veridical perception,” or perception in the out-of-body state that corresponds to a physical reality with which one is unfamiliar, is difficult in the extreme. Still, one wonders: if difficult perception does not completely obviate objective projection into the physical world, is Aardema perhaps too cautious in claiming that “you construct your perception of reality in discordance with objective reality” (150)? For example, the author’s own experiments in veridical perception with cards and nails in blocks of wood are not wholly unsuccessful.

The degree of subjectivity increases as one shifts from the physical field to the personal field, which is “the inner psyche of the projector” (157). An OBE in the personal field provides “a rare three-dimensional glimpse into your own mind” (161). Here it is possible to experience not only one’s various past and future selves (a view related to the “multiple worlds” theory in quantum physics) but also the “soul” (others call it the monad; Bruce Moen calls it the disk; Robert A. Monroe calls it the higher self or the I-There cluster). The personal field also provides opportunities to do “housecleaning” by interacting with aspects of the self, to engage in “mindscaping” of the out-of-body environment via the imagination, and to indulge in “disinhibitory behaviors” (164–76). In short, this field is where one can further individuation by confronting inner problems and acting out repressed emotions.

Whereas the physical and personal fields are highly subjective, Aardema attributes some objectivity to the collective field, which includes Focus levels 22–27. Although he grants that “the idea of life after death is not an outlandish possibility to consider” (249) and that phenomena in the collective field are more stable than in the physical or personal field, the unexpected events that happen in the collective field do not necessarily signal greater objectivity. It is more certain, however, that the collective field is the realm of “archetypes and other primordial imagery” (249), symbolic and metaphorical communication, and “repository fields of consciousness” where past and future information is stored. There is no mention of the Akashic Record or the Library, but perhaps these are among the metaphors he has in mind. In any case, Aardema is at least less uncertain about the collective field. He writes: “I feel more comfortable with the ‘reality’ of this field than any other. In fact there is little doubt in my mind that controlled access to these repository fields of consciousness by a significant number of talented individuals has the potential to lead to a renaissance in culture, politics, literature, science, technology, and art unlike any ever before seen in human history” (232).

Aardema’s positions on the afterlife and the second body clearly differ from the views of other familiar authors. Quite satisfied that the afterlife is objectively real, Moen designed his *Afterlife Knowledge Guidebook* to help others come to the same conclusion. As for some sort of energy body that separates from the physical body, Steven M. Greer relates the story in *Hidden*

Truth—Forbidden Knowledge of how his wife, while wide awake, sees his spirit leave his body during his lucid dream of flying over the South American jungle. In *Cosmic Journeys* and *Soul Journeys*, Rosalind McKnight advocates a five-level system of energy bodies like the theosophical model that Aardema rejects, yet she proposes it as a way of understanding the phase shifting that he accepts. Similarly, Preston Dennett's experiences in *Out-of-Body Exploring* also suggest that a variety of bodies participate in an OBE. As his experiences illustrate, the higher the dimension, the fewer energy bodies we take with us; and those bodies come back together as we descend.

Ironically, Aardema's argument in *Explorations in Consciousness* subtly deconstructs itself at various points by seeming to affirm the objective separation of a second body. He mentions Monroe's "pinching someone in the out-of-body state, which coincided with a real physical effect on the person" (145). Skeptical of such occurrences, Aardema sets out to see for himself, attempting to heal his wife's thyroid cancer while he is out-of-body. Although one of her tumors disappears and the other is so significantly reduced in size that radiation treatment is unnecessary, he claims that "none of this proves that my out-of-body activity was responsible" (148), much less that he was in an objectively real second body. Moreover, the OBEs that he shares with his wife while she is dreaming are used to support the idea that they are merely sharing the personal field of consciousness rather than an objectively real out-of-body state. One also wonders if there is more than a mental construct afoot when "*after exiting, I stood in front of the bed for a while, watching myself sleep*" (92). Later he notes that he "*stepped outside*" of himself (251), which sounds like shifting to a higher energy body. Similarly, he states that you can "leave your second body in a third body" but quickly asserts, "Of course, you are not really in an objective third body. We are dealing with habits and constructions of reality rather than any sort of objective, energetic phenomenon" (289). One suspects that the woman whom Monroe pinched might beg to differ. As well, perhaps failure to recognize the second body's objective reality is why Aardema receives a low score on "world view" during a life review in Focus 27 (212).

Aardema emphasizes instead Monroe's scientific approach and his idea that in an OBE "you are journeying through consciousness itself" (25). In fact, Monroe's influence permeates *Explorations in Consciousness*. The author's first exposure to OBEs was *Journeys Out of the Body*. He adopts the term "second body," which is Monroe's coinage, along with his "quick-switch" method of phasing out of one area of consciousness and into another. The Focus levels are mentioned, as are the (M) Band and the H-Band of human consciousness. In addition, Aardema reports various attempts to contact Monroe while out of body. But perhaps most significantly, the six-step "vigil method" of inducing an OBE is an elaboration of Monroe's own technique at the end of *Journeys*. The key to their shared method is sensory reduction (mind awake/body asleep), but Aardema adds the helpful technique of setting an anchor in wakefulness and emphasizes the importance of keeping a dream journal and the potential of Hemi-Sync® to help quiet the mind. Likewise, he offers some excellent advice for traveling

once the out-of-body state has been achieved, such as using the void (akin to Focus 15) to shift from one area of consciousness to another.

Since *Explorations in Consciousness* is a very important book, it is a pity that it contains a significant number of lower-order writing problems. These include missing words, dangling modifiers, and the presence of stylistic problems (the overuse of “effectuate,” “as such,” “such as, for example,” and multiple negatives in a single sentence). Some of these matters may compromise even the general reader’s experience of the text. Nevertheless, Aardema’s theory and practice of the OBE deserve careful consideration—his book is bound to become one of the classic texts on the subject.

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